

Ideas for Using Songs in the English Language Classroom

By Deniz Kurtoglu Eken

Teachers use songs in the English language classroom for a variety of reasons, the most common being:

- to present a topic, a language point, lexis, etc.
- to practice a language point, lexis, etc.
- to focus on common learner errors in a more indirect way
- to encourage extensive and intensive listening
- to stimulate discussion of attitudes and feelings
- to encourage creativity and use of imagination
- to provide a relaxed classroom atmosphere
- to bring variety and fun to teaching and learning

But these aims do not mean much on their own, and we need to consider the techniques that accompany them. The box on this page provides a variety of such techniques. It should go without saying that a teacher's selection of a technique or a set of techniques should be guided by his/her objective(s) for the class.

I would like to describe three different sets of activities I have recently devised for both my intermediate level students and my trainees on the RSA course. I believe that these activities are not only creative but also employ a variety of the techniques listed above serving multiple purposes.

ACTIVITY 1: Listen, Visualize, and Draw

MUSIC: Vivaldi, *Spring Allegro*

MATERIALS: Blank paper, colored pen

TIME: 15-20 minutes

Step 1: The students are asked to relax, sit back and close their eyes (dim lights, if possible). The teacher turns on the music and as the music plays, the students are given the following prompts to visualize a picture in their minds:

Where are you?

Are you alone?

What are you doing?

How do you feel?

Step 2: The music is still playing in the background. This time students are asked to open their eyes and to draw the picture they have visualized on the blank paper provided.

Step 3: Students are divided into pairs and are encouraged to share what they have visualized and drawn. (At this stage the teacher can rewind the tape and play the music once again in the background.)

Step 4: The teacher encourages whole-class feedback.

TECHNIQUES FOR USING SONGS			
1. Fill in the blanks	a. without listening b. while listening	systematic or random	
2. Put into the correct sequence	a. lines b. pictures	without listening or while listening	
3. Identify the wrong word/phrases	a. systematic b. random	e.g. common errors	
4. Write in the missing lines	a. systematic b. random	e.g. certain structures	
5. Add a final verse	a. What could the final verse be about? b. create a final verse		
6. Circle the antonyms/synonyms of the given words in the song as you listen.			
7. Imagine and draw	a. no guidance b. guidance	- questions - key words	songs without lyrics
8. Complete a mind map	a. without listening b. while listening		
9. Discuss attitude and feelings			
10. Design/answer a music questionnaire			
11. Sing!			

ACTIVITY II: Let the Pictures Speak

MUSIC: Rod Stewart *Have I Told You Lately?*

MATERIALS: A set of pictures, slips of paper

TIME: 25-30 minutes

Step 1: The teacher distributes in jumbled order, a set of pictures (see illustration on next page) to each student. The students lay the pictures out on their desks. The teacher tells the students to put the pictures into the correct sequences as they listen to the first part of the song. Let the students listen to the first part of the song again.

Step 2: Students are asked to compare their sequence with the person sitting next to them.

Step 3: The teacher asks for feedback: Which one is the first picture? (Students are asked to hold up their pictures or say the corresponding letter). "Do you remember the words for this picture?" etc. The teacher lets the students hear the first line on the tape after eliciting the response and then tapes the first picture on the board. After this s/he writes the elicited line on the board. This procedure is repeated with the other pictures in the same manner. Consequently there are 10 sequenced pictures and their accompanying lines on the board.

Step 4: The teacher distributes slips of paper in jumbled order to each student for the second part of the song. Students lay the slips out in front of them and put the lines into the correct sequence as they listen to the second part of the song.

THE SLIPS:

M There's a love that's divine
K And it's yours and it's mine
N And at the end of the day
J We should give thanks and pray
L To the one. To the one

Step 5: Students are asked to compare their sequence with the person sitting next to them.

Step 6: The teacher asks for feedback. Students say the lines or the corresponding letters in the correct sequence. This is then checked against the sequence on the tape, line-by-line.

Step 7: Now the students have the first part of the song on the board and the second part in front to them. The teacher plays the rest of the song and encourages students to sing along. (Since the first and second verses are repeated in the rest of the song, the teacher does not need to rewind the tape).

Step 8: The teacher encourages discussion of the singer's feelings and what he has to say.

TAPESCRIPT FOR STEP 1

G Have I told you lately that I love you?
H Have I told you there's no one else above you?
I You fill my heart with gladness
F Take away all my sadness

D Ease my troubles, that's what you do
A Oh the morning sun and all its glory...
C Reach the day with hope and comfort too
B You fill my heart with laughter
E Take away and make it better
D Ease my troubles that's what to do

Step 1: The teacher distributes exercise 1 to each pair. Students are asked to jot down the antonyms and synonyms. They should be encouraged to make use of their existing knowledge first, but if they have difficulties, they can consult the dictionary/thesaurus in class. Students should also be told that the words they find need to be the same parts of speech as the ones in the exercise.

Step 2: Pairs join with another pair to exchange ideas.

Step 3: Students listen to the first part of the song and circle any antonym they have found that is used in the song.

Step 4: The teacher stops the tape at the end of the first two verses and elicits answers. The answers and the other antonyms that the students have found, are written on the board. The teacher circles the answers.

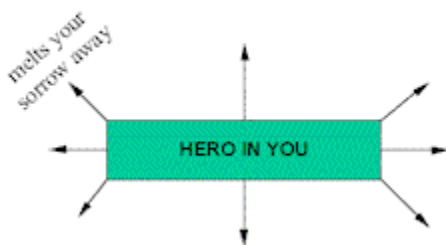
N.B. If the teacher writes only the answers on the board (i.e., the antonyms that appear in the songs), Step 1 will not achieve its aim. Therefore other antonyms should be written on the board, and students should be praised for having come up with other words and phrases.

Step 5: Steps 3 and 4 are repeated in the same manner with the second and third parts of the song.

Step 6: The teacher rewinds the tape and asks students to listen intensively to the first two verses of the song and answer the question: What do you think is meant by,...a hero lies in you?"

The teacher stops the tape at the end of the first two verses and encourages discussion.

Step 7: The following chart is drawn on the board. Students are asked to listen to the whole song and complete the chart by answering the question, "What does the hero in you do?" At this stage the teacher can provide examples to clarify the task.



Step 8: The teacher encourages whole-class discussion and feedback.

Step 9: As a follow-up activity, students are asked to think of a difficult situation they once found themselves in and another that they solved completely on their own. They are then asked to comment on how they solved the problem.

These activities have provided a relaxed, friendly, and cooperative classroom atmosphere that has allowed my intermediate-level students to practice language in a rich, authentic context. These activities have aroused a lot of interest in my teacher-trainees providing them with a variety of techniques that they can use in their classes for different language teaching and learning purposes.

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